



# Managing a Multi-Generational Workforce

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## Presenters

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# Background:

Barbara McIntosh, Ph.D., UVM

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- Pressure to consider multi-generational issues
- Context: One facet in a complex rapidly changing workplace
- Limited experience
- Cohorts at Work



# Multi-Generational Workforce: Necessity not Nicety

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- By 2012, 40% of US workforce over 40
- Federal Workforce: (1.6 million civilians)
  - Half can retire in next 5 years
  - 70% of supervisors
  - National Aeronautics and Space Administration: scientists and engineers over 60 out-number those under 30, 3 to 1



# Another Facet of Change

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- Labor shortages (not surplus)
- Knowledge based (not physical labor)
- Team driven (not hierarchically driven)
- Diversity: gender, race, ethnicity, etc.
- Technology
- Globalization



# What Do We Know?

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- Interaction Research Literature:
  - Family Based
    - Parenting
    - Grandparenting
  - Relationship Based
    - Supervising/counseling children, young adults
    - Teaching (expert)
    - Mentoring (sharing)
  - Work Based
    - Reporting Structures
    - Non-personal goals/expectations



# Cohort Characteristics: All Valued ~ All Needed

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- Veterans (1909-1945)
  - Outlook: practical
  - Work Ethic: dedicated
  - View of Authority: respectful
  - Leadership by: hierarchy
  - Relationships: personal sacrifice
  - Perspective: civic
  
- Baby Boomers ( 1946-1964)
  - Outlook: optimistic
  - Work Ethic: driven
  - View of Authority: love/hate
  - Leadership by: consensus
  - Relationships: personal gratification
  - Perspective: team



# Cohort Characteristics:

## All Valued ~ All Needed (2)

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- Generation X (1965-1985)
  - Outlook: skeptical
  - Work Ethic: balanced
  - View of Authority: unimpressed
  - Leadership by: competence
  - Relationships: reluctant to commit
  - Perspective: self
  
- Generation Y / Millennial (1986- )
  - Outlook: hopeful
  - Work Ethic: ambitious
  - View of Authority: relaxed, polite
  - Leadership by: achievers
  - Relationships: loyal
  - Perspective: civic



# Messages that Shaped Them

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- Veterans (1909-1945)
  - Make do or do without
  - Stay in line
  - Sacrifice
  - Be heroic
  - Consider the common good
- Baby Boomers ( 1946-1964)
  - Be anything you want to be
  - Change the world
  - Work well with others
  - Live up to expectations
  - Duck and cover





# Messages that Shaped Them 2

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- Generation X (1965-1985)
  - Don't count on it
  - Remember--heroes...aren't
  - Get real
  - Survive—Staying alive
  - Ask “why?”
  
- Generation Y/ Millennial (1986- )
  - Be smart—you are special
  - Leave no one behind
  - Connect 24/7
  - Achieve now!
  - Serve you community



# Stereotyping

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- Inflexible characterizations of *everyone* in a group. Clearly, there is wide variation
- Generalizations, however, offer insight, awareness, and empathy.
- Social cognition - - self-ascribed characterizations



# Management Implications:

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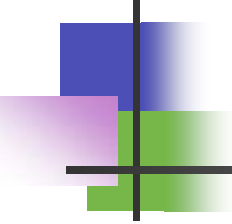
- #1 Culture
  - Respect (all forms of diversity)
  - Valuing others (contributions to the team)
  - Sensitivity to other perspectives
  - Openness to change
  - Policies and practices re: treatment of others
  - Top management - voice



# Generational Awareness:

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- Audit
- Training: Develop value proposition for each generation
- Review policies and practices in terms of preferences
- Review makeup of Board of Directors



# Six Principles for Mixing Generations (C. Raines)

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1. Initiate conversations about generations
2. Ask people about their needs and preferences
3. Offer options
4. Personalize your style
5. Build on strengths
6. Pursue different perspectives



# Generations Friendly?

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- There's not just one type of person who is successful here.
- We form teams to consciously involve multiple perspectives.
- Employees are treated as customers.
- We talk about different viewpoints.



## Generations Friendly? (2)

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- We talk openly about what we want from our jobs
- We have a minimum of bureaucracy
- Our work atmosphere is relaxed and informal
- We have a lot of fun together.
- We are known for being straightforward with each other



# Generations Friendly? (3)

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- We expect the best from everyone and treat them as if they have great things to offer and are motivated to do their best.
- We focus on retention every day.
- Our work assignments are broad, providing variety and challenge, and allowing each employee to develop a range of skills.

Adapted from: Zemke, R., Raines, C., & Filipczak, B. (2000) Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace. NY: Amacom





# Next Steps?

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- Drill Down: HR policies and practices  
Diane Piktialis, Ph.D., The Conference Board
- Think about behaviors, i.e., multi-generational conflict management  
Debra Magnuson, Leadership Development Services